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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a demonstration of a totally integrated discovery procedure to present sentence-combining practice. This practice makes students aware not only of the complex structures but of the usage and style related to each structure. Guidelines for the execution of the practice include: (1) the use of a sequence of questions by the teacher, (2) use of semantic relationships as a basic criterion for the combinations, (3) use of sentences in the practice that might naturally be used separately within each group that is to be combined, (4) incorporation within the practice of matters of usage and style, (5) incorporation within the practice of an awareness of sentence faults, and (6) integration within the practice of grammatical terminology. A detailed description of the demonstration is offered and the combination of sentences is appended. (Contains 8 references.) (JP)

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ED 366 208

USING SENTENCE-COMBINING PRACTICE TO TEACH SENTENCE STRUCTURE

(A demonstration given at TESOL meetings and at meetings abroad)

by MARCELLA FRANK

In this demonstration I show how I use a totally integrated discovery procedure to present sentence-combining practice. This practice makes students aware not only of the complex structures but of the usage and style related to each structure.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Although efforts to teach sentence structure through actual practice have been made for a long time, it was the influence of the modern linguists that pointed the way to systematic practice based on theoretic assumptions.

I might mention first the influence of the structural linguists in the fifties and early sixties. Their basic assumption was that a complex sentence was an expansion of a simple sentence pattern. Studies were made to prove that practice in using such expansions improved students' sentence structure. One of the most important studies was done by Donald R. Bateman (1959). Student writing in the eighth grade was checked before and after the students had had a chance to practice consciously the complex syntactic patterns one at a time. Bateman reported that "this later writing is more heavily modified and thus richer in detail, the sentences tend to be longer and the syntactic units they are composed of are more carefully interrelated." (pp. 15-16).

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An important linguistic development that gave an even stronger impetus to the interest in teaching sentence structure through practice came from transformational grammar with the publication of Chomsky's Syntactic Structures in 1957. Chomsky's assumption was that a sentence is a combination of structures, some of which have been transformed from simple sentences.

The practical result of this assumption was an increasing interest in the possibility of sentence-combining practice as a means of improving writing.

Studies were made to prove that such practice could indeed result in students writing more syntactically mature sentences. Many of these studies are mentioned in Vivian Zamel's excellent review of sentence-combining in the March 1980 issue of the TESOL Quarterly. Among the most influential of such studies were those done by John D. Mellon (1969) and Frank O'Hare (1973, 1974). Student texts on sentence-combining also began to appear, one of the best known being Strong's Sentence Combining: A Composing Book (1973).

Another approach to teaching sentence structure through practice was offered by Christensen (1963) in his generative rhetoric. This approach involves another kind of sentence expansion. For this practice, students are given base sentences which they expand by adding modifiers that express their own ideas. These modifiers are mainly nonrestrictive elements that might have been put in a separate sentence.

My own interest in sentence combining as effective sentence structure practice stems from two sources - from rhetoric and from linguistics.

The first source was from a rhetoric text I used when I first began to teach college English to native speakers. The text, Writing Mature Prose :The Mastery of Sentence Structure, by Baxter Hathaway (1951), gave practice with forms for predications within sentences. The practice consisted of combining sentences by either keeping the full form of predications or reducing some so that they fit within the structure of others.

The second source, which came somewhat later for me, was Chomsky's Syntactic Structures. I was quite excited about the book because it presented from a linguistic point of view what Hathaway had done from the point of view of rhetoric. The concept of kernels and transformations in Syntactic Structures was roughly the linguistic equivalent of Hathaway's full predications and reduced predications.

I have continued to be a firm believer that sentence-combining practice can improve students' use of the complex structures, especially if the practice is planned carefully. This is what I have done in the totally integrated unit on sentence combining that I am demonstrating today. The following are some of the guidelines I have followed for the controlled presentation and execution of the practice.

1. The use of an orderly sequence of questions by the teacher to develop a step-by-step awareness of the complex structures that result from the combinations. This dialog between the teacher and the class enables students to make discoveries by themselves of syntactic possibilities.

2. The use of semantic relationships as my basic criterion for the combinations. The sentences have been carefully chosen to

represent the wide range of choices to express these relationships. Thus meaning is integrated within the practice.

3. The use of sentences in the practice that might naturally be used separately within each group that is to be combined.

4. The incorporation within the practice of matters of usage (especially punctuation and position) and style (especially distinctions between formal and informal style).

5. The incorporation within the practice of an awareness of sentence faults, such as fragments and run-on sentences.

6. The integration within the practice of grammatical terminology.

DEMONSTRATION

For this demonstration, I use the conference particpants as students. I begin by showing how I introduce the practice by working with sentences expressing two of the most common types of relationships, cause-effect and concession.

First I put on the board these two sentences:

The boy was sick.

He didn't come to school.

Then I ask in sequence the questions that follow.

Question 1 - What is the logical relationship between these two sentences?

I get cause-effect.

Question 2 - How might the sentences be combined merely by punctuation?

I get: The boy was sick; he didn't come to school.

I explain that if there is no connecting word between the two parts, a semicolon must be used. By replacing the period, the semicolon allows two sentences that are felt as related to be put into one sentence. (Note - this is the first step in the long process of trying to eliminate run-on sentences.)

Question 3 - How might the sentences be combined by adding a connecting word between them that expresses the relationship of result?

I get: The boy was sick, so he didn't go to school.

and The boy was sick; therefore, he didn't go to school.

I draw attention to the difference in punctuation, and point out that words like <u>therefore</u> require the semicolon in the position where the period was. I also establish through questioning that a word like <u>therefore</u> can move to other places in the second part of the sentence, but the semicolon must remain in the position of the original period.

Question 4 - How might the sentences be combined by using a structure that indicates cause rather than effect? (For this operation, we begin to work with changes in the first sentence.)

I get: Because the boy was sick, he didn't go to school.

and Because of his sickness, the boy didn't go to school.

and Being sick, the boy didn't go to school.

By further questioning, I establish that these structures can also move to other adverbial positions. I also ask for synonyms for <u>because</u> and <u>because of</u>. I point out that these structures of cause must be attached to the rest of the sentence; otherwise they are incomplete sentences (fragments).

In the course of the discussion, other questions about punctuation usually come up, especially the optional use of the comma after words like therefore and the use of commas to cut off the initial structures that are produced. During the discussion, I am able to point out which words are informal (so) and which are more formal (therefore).

If other ways of expressing cause-effect are mentioned, we discuss these, but I do not force them from the students, in order not to overload the preliminary discussion.

I do the same type of analysis for combining sentences that have a concessive relationship, using the sentences: The boy was sick. He came to school anyhow.

Then we proceed to do some of the exercises that follow, exploring all the possibilities of producing combinations for each set of sentences. These sentences contain the relationships of cause-effect, contrast (concessive and adversative), time, and condition. I continue to point out the punctuation and position of the structures within the combined sentences, as well as those expressions or structures that are more or less formal than others.

Finally, I mention that at a second class session, we finish the practice based on the attached sentences. I repeat the blackboard presentation of the sentence combinations I did the first time, but this time I ask the class to give me the grammatical term for each structure they produce. I explain that these complex structures consist of only some kind of clause, which contains the subject-predicate elements of a full sentence, or some kind of phrase. For example, for Because the boy was sick, I ask first whether it is a clause or a phrase.

Then I mention that it can move to other positions like an adverb. Eventually I get the name adverbial clause from the class. For the different kinds of phrases, I give enough identifying characteristics so that students are also able to give me the name. For example, the participial phrase begins with the -ing participle, the prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and ends with a noun. By repeating this kind of questioning for many of the complex structures that students produce during the practice, I feel that they can internalize the grammatical terminology more easily than if they simply memorize definitions in a text.

COMBINATION OF SENTENCES

Marcella Frank

Combine each set of sentences in as many ways as you can. Make whatever changes are necessary, but preserve the logical relationship between the sentences.

1. Mr. X ate too much.
   He got indigestion.
2. They would like to buy a new house.
   They can't afford one right now.
3. They made very careful preparations.
   Then they did the experiment.
4. Stop driving so fast.
   We'll have an accident.
5. There are many more hospitals in this country than there used to be.
   There are still not enough to meet the increasing need for hospital care.
6. He suffered a heart attack.
   During this time he was playing tennis.
7. He's studying harder now.
   His grades in school are still very poor.
8. My wife may call the office.
   In this case, tell her I'll be back in an hour.
9. We can't grant you any more credit.
   First, all your bills must be paid.
10. Some people require very little sleep.
    Others need at least eight hours sleep.
11. Frieda was absorbed in a fascinating novel.
    At the same time her dinner was burning on the stove.
12. The story might be true or it might be a false rumor.
    In any case, he should not have repeated the story.
13. He was driving to work.
    He saw an accident.
14. We must conserve food now.
    If we don't, we'll run short later.
15. The new bookkeeper was very careless.
    The accountant spent a lot of time correcting her mistakes.

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